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SUBJECT: NORTHERN NOTES - JUNE 2008

REF: A. THESSALONIKI 048  
[1](#)B. THESSALONIKI 051  
[1](#)C. THESSALONIKI 050

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Following is a summary of last month's major developments in Northern Greece:

#### KIDNAPPED NORTHERN GRRECE INDUSTRIALIST RELEASED AFTER 13 DAYS OF CAPTIVITY

[1](#)1. (SBU) On June 23, the chairman of the Federation of Northern Greek Industries and CEO of Alumil S.A. Giorgos Milonas was released after being held hostage for 13 days (Reftel A). The industrialist appeared before the national media shortly afterward, looking remarkably relaxed, stating that he only shared "three or four small things" with the police and would not co-operate with them any more. Post's police sources explained his attitude by saying that he is being extra cautious after an ordeal that left him feeling vulnerable and exposed. Business commentators said that Mr. Milonas resigned from the post of President of Federation of Northern Greek Industries for the same reason and to lower his profile. Although the ransom that was finally paid to the abductors by the businessman's family has not been disclosed, media report that the amount was 10-12m. As they continue to search for the culprits, the police describe them as a very professional group, and they do not rule out collaboration between Greek and foreign (Balkan) criminals. The abduction of Mr. Milonas took place shortly before midnight, on Monday, June 09, inside the front yard of the victim's house.

#### PORT PRIVATIZATION CONTINUES DESPITE BIDDING AND LABOR DISPUTES

[1](#)2. (U) The announcement of the highest bidder for the port of Thessaloniki's cargo station is expected around the end of July, the Authority's Managing Director Yiannis Tsaras reassured Post recently (Reftel B). However, the three involved companies -Hutchison Port Holdings, Cosco and Dubai Port World - have all lodged appeals against each other, thus delaying the examination of the bids. There were also media reports that the Port Authority's appeals evaluation committee is experiencing difficulties in carrying out its responsibilities, thus driving the competing companies to the courts and an even lengthier process to resolve their disagreements. With regard to continuing workers' mobilizations, a split has developed between administrative personnel and dock workers. The dock workers are excluded from being contracted out to the new private management and therefore are generally arguing against further job actions. The lengthy unrest has caused losses for the port and local businesses. Local media reported this month that for the first half of 2008, there was a 47.27% drop in containers handled -from 97,823 in 2007 to 51,579 in 2008- resulting in serious

dislocations in the local market.

#### REPRESENTATIVES OF ROMA ASSOCIATIONS ATTACKED IN ALEXANDROUPOLI, THRACE

¶3. (SBU) The president of the Association of Rom Women in Drosero, Xanthi, Mrs. Sabiha Souleiman and the President of Greek Muslim Women in Avantos, Alexandroupoli, Mrs. Ainour Haliloglou, told Post that they were physically and verbally attacked in Alexandroupoli by Muslim males, who objected to their use of the term "Roma" to describe certain members of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The attack took place on the occasion of a children's event that was organized jointly by the two above organizations. A group of around 200 Muslim males interrupted the proceedings, shouting "Gypsies out" and attacked the organizers, injuring them lightly. Later, they smashed the offices of Mrs. Haliloglou's association in the neighborhood of Avantos. The attackers' main grievance was that the victims, by promoting the Roma identity in the region, "divide the minority" which the attackers say "is only of Turkish origin." The victims told Post that among the instigators of the incident was the President of the Association of Greek Muslims, Mr. Mehmetali Yousoufoglou. They also mentioned that as a result of the incidents, attendance of children in two of the three kindergartens that operate in Avantos has dropped by half, while the third kindergarten has closed. They told Post that they are receiving regular threats against their lives but vowed to continue their work. Their houses remain under police surveillance.

#### TWO CASES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING SOLVED IN NORTHERN GREECE

¶4. (U) Eight Bulgarians were freed when their captor, a tobacco producer, was arrested for human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation. The Greek suspect and his Bulgarian accomplice promised the Bulgarians 50 per day and then forced them to work 16 hours per day for 1.60 and at the same time demanded 600 of each for their living expenses. In another

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case, a 22-year old Albanian was arrested for forcing into prostitution a 14-year old Albanian girl. Both cases were announced in Katerini, Pieria. Local press reported this month that Northern Greece is the main gateway to Europe for victims of trafficking. The vast majority of them - 90% - originate from Eastern Europe, while a recent increase has been observed in the number of victims from Nigeria. These facts were confirmed by post's contacts in the NGO sector. In Thessaloniki, media reports that there are around 9,000 victims, while police have dealt with 41 cases in 2007, out of a national total of 100.

#### ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ARRESTED - 15 FROM BURMA

¶5. (U) Post's police contacts have expressed fears about a wave of illegal immigrants from Burma that has begun to materialize this month in northern Greece. In one incident, police located a truck carrying 45 illegal immigrants, 15 of whom were from Burma, 23 from Pakistan and 7 from Iraq. They were all planning to continue on to other European countries.

#### SUNDAY NEWSPAPER ACCUSES CONSULATE GENERAL OF CONSPIRACY TO DESTABILIZE NORTHERN GREECE

¶6. (U) Sensationalist, high-circulation national weekly "To Proto Thema" accused the Consulate General and the Consul General personally of activities aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of Greece, through the encouragement of minority activists and supporters. The articles included alleged excerpts of Greek Intelligence Agency (EYP) reports alerting the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Post's initiatives. The articles included reference to Consul General Yee's invitation to Macedonian law enforcement officials to attend a Consulate-organized regional conference on trans-border cooperation and his request to the Greek delegation that they avoid discussing the name issue with Macedonian participants

during the seminar. Finally, there was reference to various meetings carried out by the Consul General and other staff with minority representatives, questioning their purpose and concluding that "a Kosovo-like secessionist scheme for Greece" is already underway. Embassy Athens contacted the newspaper, denying the allegations. The paper printed two similar articles in successive issues, ignoring the denial.

#### NUMBER OF DRUG ADDICTS IN THESSALONIKI IS RISING

¶7. (U) Local media reported this month that the inability of the government to meet the financial needs of centers for preventing and fighting drug addiction is fostering a rise in the numbers of confirmed drug addicts. Of the 21,000 reported addicts in Thessaloniki, only 950 can be accommodated in rehabilitation programs and there is a waiting list of 1500. Representatives of NGOs that are active in the field have highlighted the issues they are facing as a result of inadequate state infrastructure, including work overload, limited resources and have described the situation as "desperate." Additionally, in 2007, one ton of heroin is estimated by police to have transited through Thessaloniki of which only 10% was tracked down and confiscated by the police.

#### VIOLENT STUDENT REACTION TO UNIVERSITY REFORMS

¶8. (U) Aristotle University Rector Anastasios Manthos was hospitalized after a confrontation with angry students protesting university reforms on May 29 (Reftel C.) Anarchists attacked and seriously injured two university guards the following day. The anarchists stated that they attacked the guards in opposition to the presence of security personnel on campus, allegedly in violation of the university "asylum" policy. Two days later, at the University of Macedonia, the Dean's Council was held hostage by a group of students for eight hours. The students were protesting the University's first-ever four-year planning cycle, which they deemed to be the first step towards "turning the university into an enterprise." In a similar incident on June 24, 30 professors were held hostages by students at Aristotle University for about four hours, in response to a law providing for the termination of free distribution of textbooks in universities. Leftist student group representatives blamed the media for blowing the incidents out of proportion, while academics have condemned the political system for failing to actively support public universities and help break the current cycle of violence and unrest that threatens them.

YEE